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Connecticut: A Legacy of Land

First Annual Report on
Open Space Protection
1998 Acquisitions

State of Connecticut
Department of
Environmental Protection

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For more information about land acquisition and open space issues, contact the DEP, your municipality, nonprofit land conservation organizations, the Trust for Public Land, the Land Conservation Coalition of Connecticut, or the Land Trust Service Bureau.

August 1999

Printed on recycled paper.

Cover images from left to right: Fishing in the Farmington River (by Susan Lapides), American Oystercatcher (by Paul Fusco), A view of the Salmon River (by Hal Malde)

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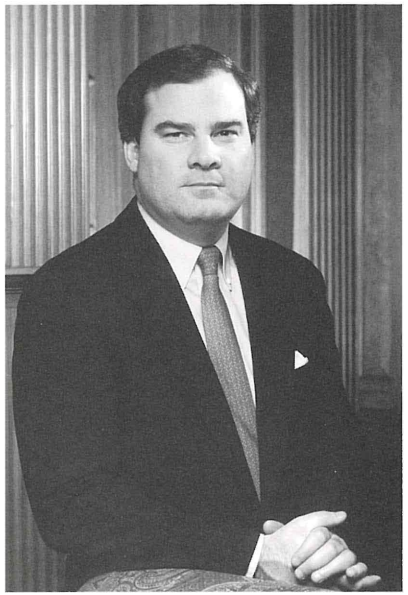
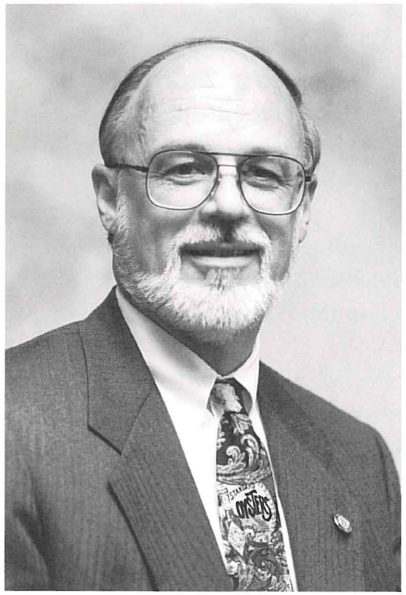


In its first year, Connecticut's Open Space Initiative made great progress in acquiring natural land. Our goal is to set aside 21 percent of the state's total acreage as open space by the year 2023. Thanks to the cooperation and dedication of the General Assembly, the Department of Environmental Protection, municipalities, water companies, and land conservation groups, we have made significant gains toward meeting that goal. As Governor, I am committed to achieving it.

When the State's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Open Space was formed, it reviewed Connecticut's statutory goal for state-held open space and developed implementation strategies. Based on the recommendations of the Task Force, a comprehensive five-year, $166 million initiative was launched to preserve open space.

The State has always worked arduously to preserve its natural beauty and diversity. In the future, broad-based partnerships among the state, municipalities, and land preservation groups will continue that effort. Conservation of our landscape is a key to maintaining Connecticut as a special place to live and work. As we enter the new millennium, the State will remain committed to preserving open space for all citizens to enjoy.

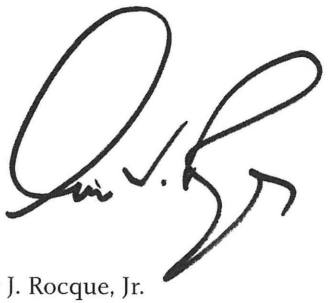
John G. Rowland
Governor



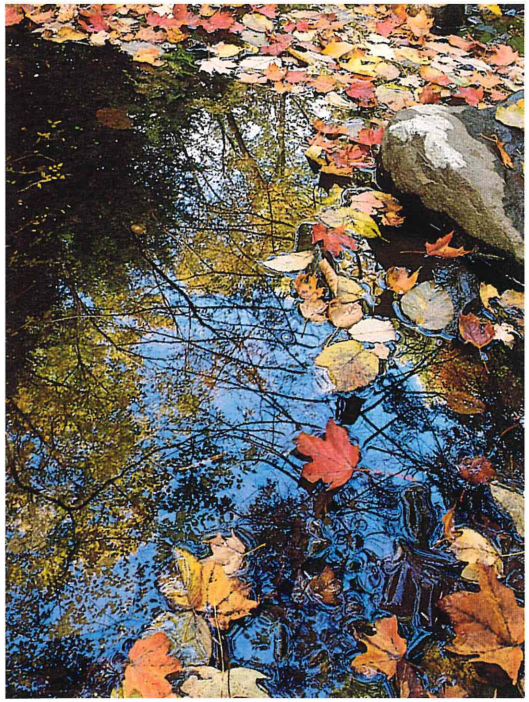
I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide this first annual report on open space acquisition in Connecticut. The past year has been a landmark time for open space in our state. Department of Environmental Protection staff have worked quickly, diligently, and aggressively in order to increase state holdings, increase public access, and protect natural resources. The result has been the acquisition of some of the most beautiful land in the state, which will be preserved for future generations.

The DEP has not worked alone. Acquisitions made over the past twelve months have occurred largely due to initiatives set in place by Governor Rowland and the Connecticut General Assembly. Through legislative changes, increased funding, and teamwork, the state's Open Space Initiative has allowed DEP to provide grants to urban and rural municipalities and nonprofit land holding associations for open space acquisitions. The initiative also provides semiannual lump sum disbursement of funds, which greatly facilitates acquisitions and allows DEP to negotiate competitively for property it wishes to purchase.

This annual report details the progress that has been made in acquiring open space property. It was produced in cooperation with the Trust for Public Land and is an excellent example of the partnerships that have formed as a result of the Open Space Initiative. With the continued commitment and collaboration of state government, local governments, and other concerned organizations, the ecological integrity and natural beauty of Connecticut's landscape will remain protected for generations.



Arthur J. Rocque, Jr.
Commissioner



Vision

Connecticut's Open Space Protection Program provides a diverse landscape that offers outdoor recreation, protects water supplies, preserves fragile natural communities and habitats for plants and animals, offers green spaces accessible to city residents, and maintains a working natural landscape for the harvest of farm and forest products.

Twenty-One Percent for the Twenty First Century

Connecticut's prosperity has always depended upon its natural resources. Forests and farms contribute to a healthy and diverse economy. Parks and open lands improve the quality of life and help attract businesses. Natural areas and waterways provide critical wildlife habitat, clean drinking water, and scenic natural beauty, which is the foundation of the tourism industry.

In 1997 and 1998, Governor John G. Rowland and the General Assembly of Connecticut initiated several new policies to help protect Connecticut's natural resources for future generations:

- To acquire not less than 10 percent of the state's land as open space in state ownership as part of the state's system of parks, forests, wildlife, and natural resource management areas. To meet this objective, an additional 111,000 acres must be acquired; and

- To help protect not less than 11 percent of the state's land as open space owned by municipalities, land conservation organizations, and water companies. To achieve this goal, the state must work with municipalities, private nonprofit organizations, water companies, and the federal government to foster and encourage the protection of an additional 127,000 acres.

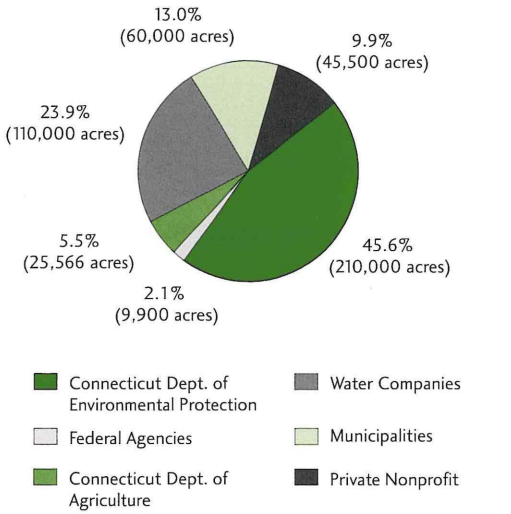
The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has been charged to meet these two important goals by 2023.

Armed with stronger financial resources, a streamlined funding process, and a new matching grant program, DEP is aggressively pursuing these goals. To succeed in protecting a total of 21 percent of Connecticut's land by the first quarter of the 21st Century, the state must remain committed to acquiring open space for the next two decades.

Between 1998 and 2003, Governor Rowland proposed spending $166 million in state bond funds for land protection – a plan that has been widely supported by legislators, local officials, and the public.

In 1998, the General Assembly passed the first proposed allocation of $29.5 million ($19.5 million for the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program and $10 million for the Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program) for fiscal year 1998-99.

Protected Land in Connecticut by Ownership



Autumn leaves in Cheshire Ridge (by Ernest Braun)

Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next two decades, land ownership in Connecticut is expected to change dramatically. These changes present a unique opportunity to purchase and conserve large tracts of land.

First, a generational transfer of land ownership will begin in the near future. According to the Council on Environmental Quality, 80 percent of Connecticut's forestland – roughly 1.5 million acres – is privately owned by landowners who, on average, are over 60 years old. Over the next thirty years, it is likely that much of this land will be divided into smaller parcels and put on the market by heirs who are unable to maintain it.

Recent policy changes are also expected to stimulate institutional land sales. The 1996 amendments to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act continue to place pressure on water companies to sell former and surplus sources of drinking water in order to finance filtration plant construction and infrastructure investments. In addition, Public Act 98-28, which deregulated Connecticut's electric industry, may result in land sales by electric utilities as they divide generating and distribution systems and dispose of nonessential assets. As a result, large tracts of open space owned by these utilities may soon be put on the market.

Efficient and well-funded programs for land acquisition are essential if DEP is to purchase and maintain some of these areas as open space for the residents of Connecticut. Effective programs will allow the state to leverage private and local funds by developing strong partnerships with nonprofit conservation organizations, municipalities, and resident groups.

Public Support for Land Protection

For Connecticut to remain an attractive state in which to live, work, and conduct business, it is critical that development be balanced with land conservation. As a result, grassroots support for open space protection has grown considerably in recent years. For example, a recent Quinnipiac College poll revealed that nearly 70 percent of Connecticut residents regard open space as an important factor in the quality of their lives, and 66 percent are willing to spend money to protect it. In 1997, Governor Rowland's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Open Space held three statewide town meetings, attended by more than 500 people, at which 167 residents offered unanimous verbal and written testimony in favor of adding more land to the state's system of protected open space.

Throughout the state, communities are acquiring open space in response to strong local support. Between December 1997 and February 1999 (prior to the release of state funds through the new matching grant program), 12 municipalities allocated more than $20 million for land protection. In addition, 59 cities and towns submitted grant requests for land protection to DEP in 1998.

Plans for the Future

To meet the state's land protection objectives, DEP must sustain an effective program for approximately the next two decades. This kind of sustained effort will be possible only with continued strong support from the Governor, the General Assembly, and Connecticut's residents.

In the short term, DEP will build on its new grant program by soliciting grant proposals twice each year. These grant cycles will provide matching funds to municipalities, nonprofit land conservation organizations, and water companies. The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program will also continue its effective land acquisition program in an effort to protect Connecticut's most outstanding landscapes.

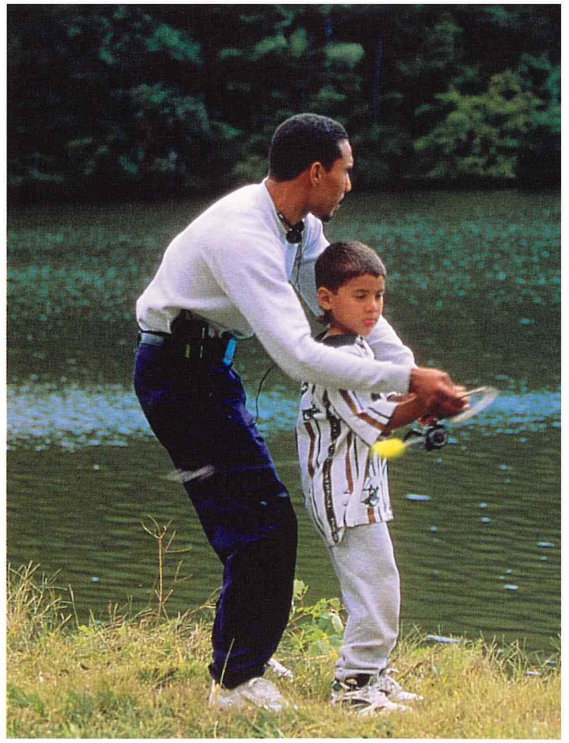
Over the long term, DEP will continue to work with the Governor, legislators, elected officials, communities, and nonprofit partners to advance a farsighted and effective land protection strategy for Connecticut. By working together, 21 percent of Connecticut's land can be protected by the first quarter of the 21st Century, providing a legacy for future generations.

1998: A Landmark Year for the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program is DEP's primary program for acquiring land to expand the state's system of parks, forests, wildlife, and other natural open spaces. Through this program, DEP acquires land that represents the ecological and cultural diversity of Connecticut, with a focus on unique features such as rivers, mountains, rare natural communities, scenic qualities, historic significance, connections to other protected land, and access to water.

In 1998, Governor Rowland and the General Assembly increased funding allocations to this program tenfold. Public Act 98-157 streamlined funding by providing lump sum acquisition dollars directly to DEP, allowing for greatly accelerated land acquisition efforts in the third and fourth quarters of 1998. DEP can now respond quickly to acquisition opportunities and negotiate effectively in the real estate market.

These recent changes to the acquisition process have already generated exciting results and have positioned DEP to achieve the goals mandated in the Governor's five-year plan.



Between July 1, 1998, and December 30, 1998, DEP acquired 12 properties, totaling 1,611 acres in 15 municipalities at a cost of $6,618,000. Several of these were acquired with the help of the Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, and other nonprofit partners. The pace of land acquisition during this six-month period is three times the average of the past two decades.

Even more importantly, DEP's enhanced flexibility and use of nonprofit partners resulted in a savings to the public of $2,709,000 – a 29 percent reduction in the purchase price of acquisitions.

Left: Salt Marshes at the Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area, Milford (by Paul Fusco), right: Learning to fish in Farmington (by Susan Lapides)

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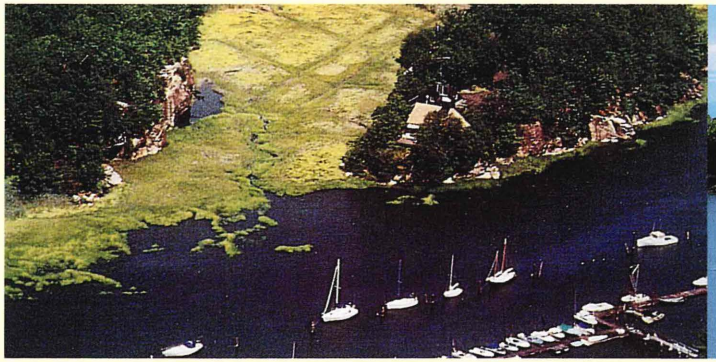

1998: State Acquisitions Through the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program

East Haddam: Babcock Pond (293 acres) Adjacent to the 1,200-acre Babcock Pond Management Area; includes critical wildlife habitat; strongly supported by the Town of East Haddam.

East Haddam: Echo Farm (300 acres) Frontage on the Salmon River and Salmon Cove; provides breeding and feeding habitat for bald eagles and other wildlife; flexibility provided by the new lump sum appropriations process enabled DEP to purchase at an estate auction, with financial assistance from The Nature Conservancy.

East Haven: Farm River State Park (62 acres) Ecologically unique tidal wetland system; protects critical fisheries and wildlife habitat; provides recreational and educational access to Long Island Sound from the urban area of East Haven; facilitated by the Trust for Public Land and supported by a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Canaan and Falls Village: Robbins Swamp (127 acres) Connecticut's largest inland wetland and one of the largest limestone-based swamps in New England; three 1998 acquisitions connect 1,300 protected acres in Robbins Swamp with the 12,500-acre Housatonic State Forest and Canaan Mountain; acquired in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Cheshire and Southington: Farmington Canal Greenway (65 acres) A 9.5-mile abandoned railroad corridor; addition to the Farmington Canal Greenway; funds contributed by the towns of Cheshire and Southington and the Department of Transportation.

Cornwall: Mohawk and Wyantenock State Forests (359 acres) Connects the Wyantenock and Mohawk State Forests; creates a contiguous 7,600-acre protected wildlife and recreation area, while also protecting the headwaters of the Shepaug River.

Haddam, Durham & Killingworth: Cockaponsett State Forest Links (54 acres) Creates a greenway for wildlife; increases the efficiency of forest management; expands opportunities for public access; provides greater opportunities for hunting, fishing, and hiking.

Killingly: Old Furnace State Park Addition (61 acres) Protects a scenic ridge line; provides new hiking trails; extends the Park westward to its logical border of Highway I-395.

Killingworth: Chatfield Hollow State Park Expansion (11 acres) Protects the integrity of Chatfield Hollow State Park; improves public access to the site.

Stamford and Greenwich: Mianus River Greenway (83 acres) Protects drinking water supply in a densely populated area; provides opportunities for recreation; serves as a link in the 12-mile Mianus River Greenway; acquired in partnership with the City of Stamford, Town of Greenwich, and the Connecticut-American Water Company; facilitated by the Trust for Public Land.

Westbrook and Deep River: Weber Block of Cockaponsett State Forest (354 acres) Connects the Cockaponsett State Forest and the Messerschmidt Pond Wildlife Area to establish a 900-acre wildlife and recreation area.

From left to right: Farm River State Park (courtesy of the Lippincott Family), Farm River State Park (by Susan Lapides), Echo Farm (by R. Perron), Luna Moth (by Paul Fusco), Echo Farm (courtesy of The Nature Conservancy), Mianus River Greenway (by Susan Lapides)

1998: The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program for Municipalities, Nonprofit Land Conservation Organizations, and Water Companies

The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program was established in 1998 to leverage private and public funds for land protection. The program provides grants to municipalities, nonprofit land conservation organizations, and water companies for the acquisition and permanent protection of open space. Priority projects help buffer drinking water sources, protect unique natural resources, maintain local agricultural lands, and provide opportunities for low-impact outdoor recreation such as hiking, fishing, and bird watching. Many of these protected areas connect to existing conservation lands, including DEP's holdings.

The program achieved a great deal in its first half-year. With help from the Natural Heritage, Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Review Board, DEP reviewed 59 proposals to preserve open space land.

In February 1999, DEP awarded $4.9 million for 19 projects proposed by 18 municipalities and nonprofit organizations – in total, protecting 2,800 acres and leveraging $20.1 million in municipal and private funds for open space land available to Connecticut's residents.

Local communities provided more than $15 million – or 75 percent of the purchase costs – in matching funds. Two additional grant rounds are anticipated in 1999.

Grant Awards – February, 1999

Bethany: Monument Stables Property (Grant: $191,250; Value: $425,000; 87 acres) Protects Bethany Bog, Lebanon Brook, and the historic Naugatuck Trail.

Branford: Medlyn Property (Grant: $227,025; Value: $504,500; 48 acres) Creates a 550-acre conservation area by linking two protected properties; protects the Branford Trail and views from Leetes Island Road, a designated Scenic Highway.

Canton: Sun, Wind & Woodland Preservation (Grant: $67,500; Value: $150,000; 145 acres) Abuts nearly 600 acres of conservation land; includes the summit of Breezy Hill, a cranberry bog, and the trails maintained by the Canton Land Conservation Trust.

East Granby: Metacomet Ridge Farm (Grant: $175,725; Value: $390,500; 411 acres) Contains two miles of the Metacomet Blue Trail; includes woodlands, meadows, wetlands, and a vernal pool.

Essex: Falls River Property (Grant: $135,000; Value: $450,000; 22 acres) Provides two miles of shoreline along the Falls River; to be acquired by the town of Essex with assistance from the Essex Land Trust, which will manage the land.

Fairfield: Brookside Drive Property (Grant: $450,000; Value: $1,700,000, 10 acres) Includes watershed land and open meadows; protects the Mill River and its floodplain.

Farmington (Flanders): Collinsville Road Property (Grant: $23,850; Value: $53,000; 5.05 acres) Protects a public drinking water supply and forested floodplain.

Glastonbury: Cider Mill Property (Grant: $337,500; Value: $750,000; 21.8 acres) Links other publicly accessible properties to create 4,000 feet of continuous public access along the Connecticut River.

Manchester Land Trust: Risley Reservoir Frontage (Grant: $36,000; Value: $80,000; 5.2 acres) Abuts 78 acres of Manchester Water Company land and 120 acres owned by the Manchester Land Trust; helps protect Risley Reservoir.

Manchester: Dennison & Case Properties (Grant: $201,493; Value: $446,163; 50 acres) An addition to the 243-acre Case Mountain Preserve; protects Case Pond; enhances public access to hiking and biking trails.

Norwalk: Betts Pond Brook Watershed Property (Grant: $450,000; Value: $4,400,000; 8 acres) Protects 8 acres of open space adjacent to the 10-acre Woods Pond Wildlife Sanctuary; provides opportunities for boating, hiking, bird watching, and educational research programs.

Old Saybrook: Gleason Property (Grant: $369,450; Value: $821,000; 267 acres) Three parcels containing wetlands, ponds, forest land, wildlife habitat, and headwaters of the tidal Oyster River.

Orange: The Racebrook Tract (Grant: $450,000; Value: $3,500,000; 230 acres) Protects Race Brook; provides opportunities for hiking, fishing, and camping.

Oxford: Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary (Grant: $450,000; Value: $2,593,628; 415 acres) An addition to the emerging 149-mile Housatonic Valley Greenway; located over the town's highest-quality aquifer; adjacent to 195 acres protected in 1998 by the town of Seymour with assistance from the Trust for Public Land.

Seymour: Keith Mitchell Forest (Grant: $450,000; Value: $1,220,000; 195 acres) Contains trails, streams, and a 25-acre reservoir; adjacent to 415 acres of Oxford property acquired in 1998 with assistance from the Trust for Public Land.

Simsbury: Sottile Property (Grant: $21,600; Value: $48,000; 24 acres) Former farmland; protects 2,300 feet of frontage on the western bank of the Farmington River.

South Windsor: Kelley Waldren-Willow Property (Grant: $315,000; Value: $700,000; 160 acres) Protects a natural area with established hiking trails and frontage along the Podunk River and Plum Gulley Brook.

Vernon: Tankerhoosen River Preservation Area (Grant: $171,000; Value: $380,000; 17 acres) Includes floodplain, wetland, and river shoreline; provides fishing access; protects the scenic character of the Tankerhoosen River.

Woodbury: Whittemore Sanctuary (Grant: $450,000; Value: $1,300,000; 686 acres) On Lake Quassapaug; to be managed by the Flanders Nature Center for environmental education, research, and recreation.

From left to right: Bluets (by Paul Fusco), Tiger Swallowtail (by Susan Lapides), The Keith Mitchell Forest, Seymour (by Susan Lapides), Seaside Sparrow (by Paul Fusco), Bird watching in Farmington (by Susan Lapides)

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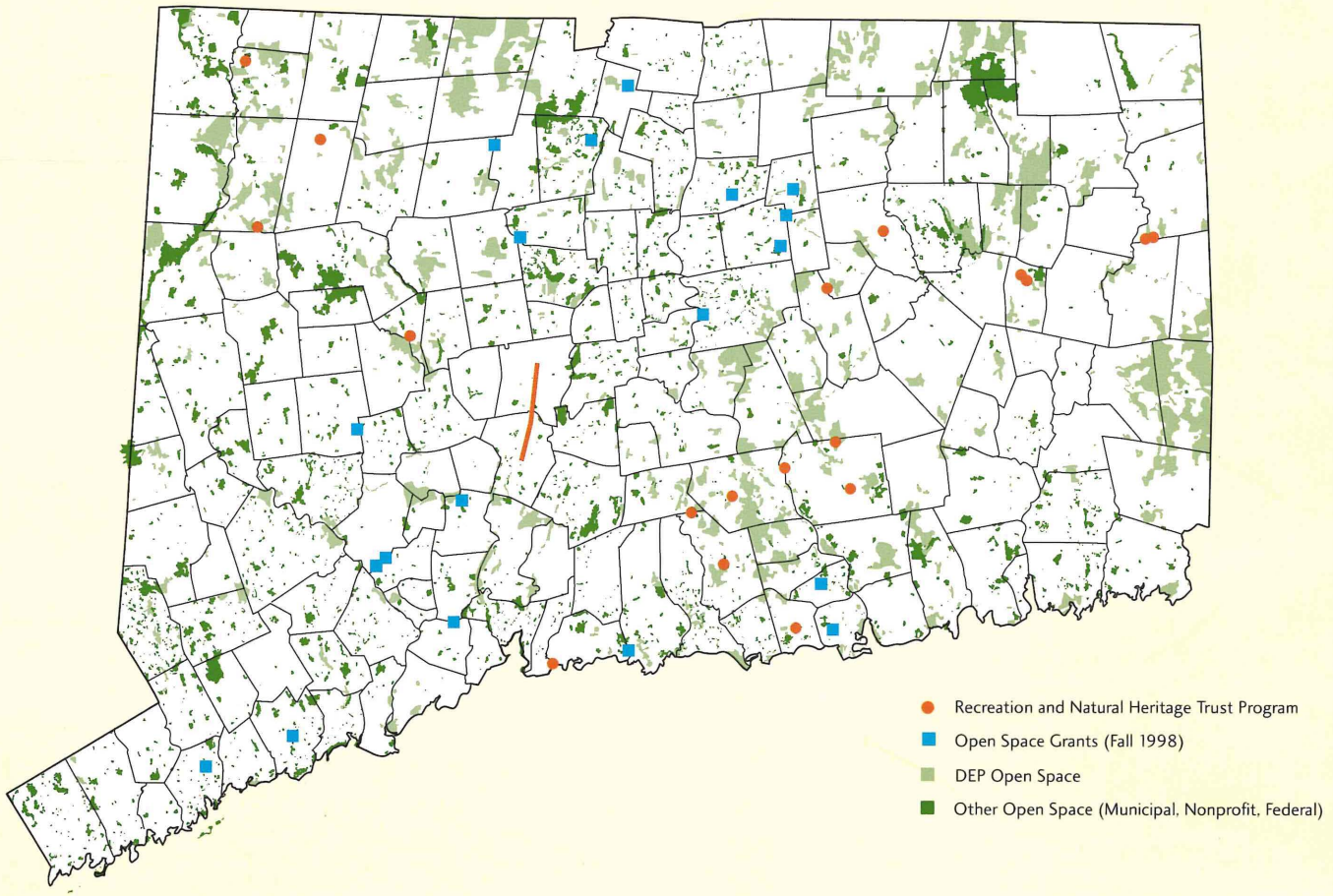
Acquisitions and Grants by Town, DEP Open Space and Other Open Space


Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program
Open Space Grants (Fall 1998)
DEP Open Space
Other Open Space (Municipal, Nonprofit, Federal)

State of Connecticut
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The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to improve the quality of life in our communities and to protect our natural and historic resources for future generations.

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